

MORNING STORIES TRANSCRIPT

Two for the Road: Caution: Your fellow motorists may be a lot closer than you think.

Tony Kahn:

Hi everybody, this is Tony Kahn, the producer and director of *Morning Stories* from WGBH in Boston. Now, if you are listening to us today in your car, perhaps on your way to work, chances are that the last thing you're really noticing are the people driving by. Through that windshield glass, we just don't seem to see each other as human beings much at all. So, today, as a kind of roadside service, we thought we'd give you a chance to get acquainted with a few of your fellow motorists out there.

We're going to hear from two people behind the wheel, out there in that faceless traffic. Once you hear their stories though, I hope you'll feel, as it says in those, you know, special rearview mirrors, that they're really a lot closer than you think. We call today's mobile *Morning Stories*, *Two for the Road*.

[Sound of car in motion]

Ravi Jain:

When I was a little kid, we lived in Florida and there was this kid's show, *The Uncle Hughby Show*...

Tony Kahn:

Meet Ravi Jain.

Ravi Jain:

...and Uncle Hughby, he would like crank up an old-style car – this was the opening sequence. He'd be riding in there and bouncing along which I always thought was hilarious and then he would kinda pull up to the studio and then go in and then it would cut to him in the studio. And suddenly, at one of the local malls, Uncle Hughby was there! And he was doing like magic tricks and I remember he called up my sister and I was like OK, there's this person that's on TV, but there, he's interacting with my sister! You know, I totally had this idea of forming this relationship with what you see – and that's always kind of fascinated me.

Tony Kahn:

I got to know Ravi a few months ago when I downloaded his video podcast (or vodcast) called, *DriveTime*. < <http://drivetime.ravijain.org> > The sheer simplicity of it is its charm. It's nothing but Ravi driving to and from work, talking to a camera that he's set in the dashboard, about all the things that are happening in his car. He told me how he got the idea.

Ravi Jain:

I was sitting at a red light in my car.

Tony Kahn:

In your car.

Ravi Jain:

And I realized, you know, I have a half-hour commute to work, so it's an hour a day. And Boston, like any city, has all sorts of fascinating people doing fascinating things [sound of car screeching to a halt under narration]. So, I had this idea of doing this talk show out of my car, as I commute to work. Anyone who has anything going on in Boston that happens to fall upon the route of you know, Jamaica Plain to Allston on my commute to and from work.

Tony Kahn:

Is it different from the relationship you would expect to have if you were doing a TV show?

Ravi Jain:

I think it is different because it, it lives on the web and it lives in a blog. [Tony murmurs in agreement] And that, you know, the "long tail" of comments becomes [sounds of car honking] part of the piece and television, as of now, it might have, "OK, let's read some viewer mail." But that's kind of filtered. After the first couple of episodes, I was getting these comments from people that were like, "You know you're really talking over your guests."

So, I made a sticky that said, "Shut up, Ravi!" [Tony chuckles] and I put that on my shifter and so the very next episode, I probably veered to the other extreme where I was like, I didn't want to say anything. But, because of the feedback I was getting, it almost becomes collaborative. It's a very simple concept that you can explain to people, you know, "By the way, I've started doing a talk-show out of my car as I commute to work." Boom! Right there.

Tony Kahn:

High concept. I get it.

Ravi Jain:

Right, so what - how can you push or pull this? And that's always kind of fascinated me. I'd love to have someone on from the Franklin Park zoo, you know, bring the little animal that's scurrying around my neck [Tony laughing] as I'm on the J-Way, you know. Ah, so things like that. There's so many - You know, it's... it is a bit selfish 'cause it's, it's an opportunity for me to meet all these different people in this area.

Tony Kahn:

Yeah.

Ravi Jain:

So, it's kind of like you set it free and, and you see what happens.

Tony Kahn:

One of the reasons I download you regularly is 'cause I really want to see what you are going to do next. And I have a feeling you don't know, yourself.

Ravi Jain:

Which is why I'm scrambling every week.

Tony Kahn:

[Laughing] I do want to say something that I hope you'll find inspiring. You talked about how when you were a kid, you, you had a relationship with television that meant something to you.

Ravi Jain:

Mmm-hmm.

Tony Kahn:

And I think that people who really end up making very original contributions sort of start that way because I knew a lady who had the same kind of feeling for television and when she was a little girl, she used to watch this western called, *Hopalong Cassidy*. [Ravi murmurs, following Tony's story] And she was sure that Hopalong Cassidy was seeing her because she was seeing him. So, she'd always dress up in a party dress. She would sit down at a little tea table in front of the television and she would put a rose in the glass so that she could have some time with Hoppy and you know what she grew up to be?

Ravi Jain:

What's that?

Tony Kahn:

The head of *Nickelodeon*.

Ravi Jain:

Wow!

Tony Kahn:

She invented a way that cable could become something completely different. She created a revolution...

Ravi Jain:

So, there's hope for me.

Tony Kahn:

...in broadcasting, so go forth and do likewise! [laughs]

[Music from Ravi's car radio in the background]

Ravi Jain:

Hi! Welcome to *DriveTime*. I would love to have some guests, but I really can't deviate from my commute, so

Tony Kahn:

If you subscribe to Ravi's show and watch it long enough – and after a while you get reminded about a special property that cars do have. It's the space where people really can talk to each other. Maybe it's all that sitting side-by-side without too much eye contact. It lets the conversation flow between people who may not know each other too well or who are already far too close to relax. Speaking from my own experience, a long drive in a car is a great place for, let's say, a teenage son and his father to get back in touch with each other and with what's on their minds.

Not long ago, we got an email from a man named Mark Richmond, in Ohio, with a story to tell about connecting with his father, long after his father had died. It all began, as he tells us, in a truck. He writes, "Thanks for putting out an outstanding show. I listen to the podcast every week, while working. If you're interested in how I got to know my dead father better last week, read on.

"In 1988, I was a senior in high school. That February, my father died of heart disease. He was the owner of *Serve-A-Lunch*, selling sandwiches, snacks, coffee and cigarettes, out of a step van to workers in the surrounding area. By the time I was born, he and his partner had a nice little thing going – about six trucks. In the 1980s, however, many of those factories closed and...bye-bye to his customer base.

"Now that I have a family of my own, I realize how much I still miss him. Sometimes I talk to my mother or brother or sister about him, hoping they'll relate a new story I haven't heard before. When that happens, it feels like he's come back to life and I had a conversation with him, because I learned something new.

[Music begins under the narration]

"This past Saturday, my supervisor, Jack (that's not his real name), rode with me on my route delivering pre-packaged snack-cakes and boxed doughnuts for a commercial baker to supermarkets and convenience stores in my assigned territory. Now when the boss works with you, it's a real headache, because it's his job to correct me on

everything I do wrong. To make matters worse, our company is going through a reorganization and we both were facing the very real possibility of getting laid off in the coming weeks.

“About two-thirds of the way through the route, I mentioned who my father was and what he did for a living. Jack said that he thought he knew my dad when he used to deliver bread. He’d heard a story about him from another driver that made regular deliveries to *Serve-A-Lunch*. Now this is a story that’s been repeated many times among drivers and has become a bit of folklore. I listened carefully.

“The driver came to my dad’s business at a point when he was behind on his bill, hoping to collect. My dad invited him in his office and said, ‘Close the door.’ The driver nervously walked in, shut the door behind him. My dad, who was a deeply religious man said, ‘Let’s pray.’ The driver said that right then, he knew he wasn’t getting his money.

“I was overjoyed at having heard this story. It sounded exactly like something my dad would’ve done. It was as if he was reminding me to relax about the possibility of losing my job, my livelihood, and to trust in my faith to help me through.”

Well Mark, thanks a lot.

[Car radio in the background – weather report]

Tony Kahn:

That was Mark Richmond with the second of today’s Morning Stories, *Two for the Road*.

We hope you enjoyed them and wherever you are listen, if you’re driving, drive carefully. Remember the life we’re saving out there is the one behind every wheel.

As always, we want to give our thanks to Ipswitch, a leader in file transfer software for sponsoring this podcast. You can drive to their website at Ipswitch dot com. That’s I-P-S-W-I-T-C-H <www.ipswitch.com>.

And be sure to keep that email coming, to <morningstories@wgbh.org> See you next Friday.

[End of Recording]

Transcribed by: Kate Macgovern

Notes from Liz:

(Regarding Ravi's story)

The first comments you made, Tony, "chances are that the last thing you're really noticing are the people driving by. Through that windshield glass, we just don't seem to see each other as human beings much at all" made me think of the following development due to our daily morning walks.

I'm a "Hi neighbor, how's it going?" sort of person, and because Tom and I walk every morning, I have developed a whole community of neighbors who drive along some of the streets along our walking route. I did this rather inadvertently by waving at people I couldn't see behind their windshields. I started out by waving at a couple of people I thought I recognized, but the combination of my not really being able to see into cars as I walked by them as they whizzed by, and my somewhat sieve like memory about whether I'd seen a certain car before, made me start waving at just about every car. I didn't want to miss waving at people I really knew, who might think me unfriendly if I didn't, and so I waved quite often. People started waving back – those I knew, and those who didn't know me at all. Little by little, almost everyone who passes us now either waves back, or even starts the interaction by waving first. It's fun!

Now, sometimes when we're elsewhere in town – at a meeting, or store, or concert or museum – people we've never talked with will come up to us and say, "We see you walking!" and go on to describe their vehicles – you know, something like, "I drive the little red pickup every morning around 7:45."